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BEFORE THE
BUSINESS & LABOR COMMITTEE
MONTANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
61ST LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Testimony of:

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Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee.

My name is Bill Squires, and I work for Blackfoot Telecommunications in Missoula. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today in support of Senate Bill 371. I hope to leave you with the message that this bill is not "anti – employee" as some would have you believe – but rather is very much for the benefit of my company's 160 employees.

Our company is one of the real life "stories" that led to this legislation. One of our employees went home during a break to let her dog out to do his dog business. While returning to our office, this employee was involved in a car accident. Despite the undisputed fact that this employee was doing her own business or the dog's business as the case may be, this accident became a workers' comp case, and she was granted benefits. Quite frankly, that just defies logic. As the employer, we did not ask or even

suggest that this person go take care of her dog business. Yet, as an employer, we are held liable for her accident under current work comp authority.

We take great pride in being an employer of choice in Missoula and Western Montana. We allow a great deal of flexibility to our employees to use their breaks to run personal errands, get a little exercise, or just get some rest. However, the suggestion from some opponents to this bill is to simply not allow employees to leave our buildings on breaks. That simply is not the kind of employer we want to be. However, if this bill is not passed, we will be forced to give serious consideration to doing exactly that. I don't like that idea, and I know our 160 employees won't like it.

I very much believe in the work comp system, and gladly pay our premiums to make sure our employees are covered if there is an accident on the job – wherever that job may take them. We want them, and their families, to have some security. However, that doesn't mean that we should become the “be all, end all” insurer of our employees when they are doing their own business. The Trial Lawyers would have you believe that this is a bad bill for employers because of the protection afforded by work comp's “exclusive remedy” provision. With all due respect, I don't need the Trial Lawyers running my business. We're not trying to curtail employee benefits. Indeed, if I wanted to do that our company would simply stop paying the full family health coverage that we currently pay.

This is just simply a common sense bill. If you are doing your own business – or your dog's business – you are not acting for your employer, and us employers should not have responsibility for their actions.

I encourage you to pass this bill out of committee with a “Do Pass” recommendation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I would be very happy to address any questions you may have.